

CONTRACTING COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS



I hope that you are finding the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Policy and Procurement segment to be rewarding as well as informative. This issue's feature article, "*Baghdad — A Contracting Officer's Perspective*" focuses on the real-life, day-to-

day experiences of a contracting officer supporting the Coalition Provisional Authority efforts in Baghdad, Iraq. From the intense heat of the sun, the thick dust in the air and what were once elaborate Hussein presidential palaces, life in Iraq as it was once known, is changing.

We are pleased to have individuals from the Army's contracting community supporting the rebuilding efforts in Iraq. Dennis Longo, a Contracting Officer from the U.S. Army Robert Morris Acquisition Center, and other dedicated contracting folks are working hard and very long days to support this ongoing effort. The contracting issues are often complex because of various funding and time constraints, communication barriers, equipment malfunctions and availability of sources and materiel just to name a few. Also, the living conditions and the water problems pose a constant challenge for our people. We applaud these individuals who are dedicated to this great effort and honor them for their tenacity to get the job done and to see real change.

Ms. Tina Ballard

Deputy Assistant Secretary
of the Army
(Policy and Procurement)

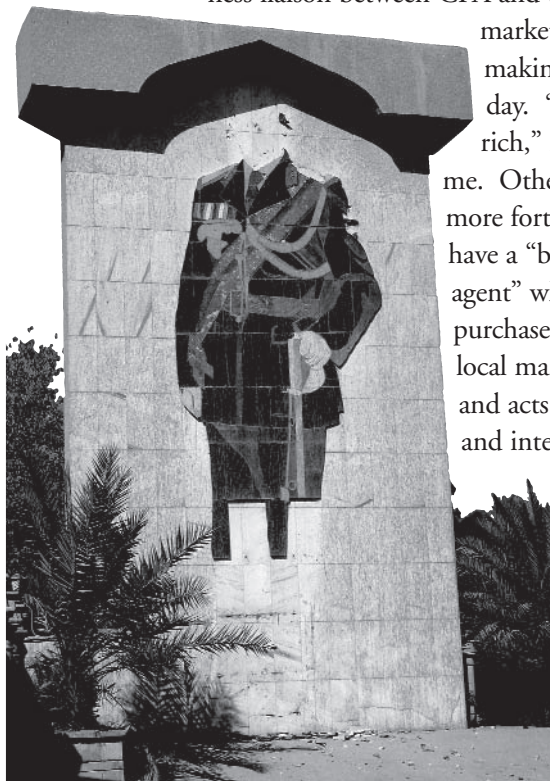
Baghdad — A Contracting Officer's Perspective

Baghdad, Iraq — Great place to work on a tan, if you can get past the thick dust in the air. We take malaria pills and drink lots of bottled water, but don't drink water out of the tap. In fact, I don't let the tap water near my

toothbrush. The sun is so intense that thick draperies cover the windows to keep the building cool. I share a trailer with three other guys. Each trailer is divided into two rooms, two bunks per room with a bathroom in between. I work on the second floor in what was one of Hussein's several elaborate presidential palaces.

Everyone working here has, it seems, a personal stake in the outcome of the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA's) efforts. I have never seen such dedication. The days are long and the work very complex because of the diverse issues: availability of sources and material, funding, time constraints, communications, equipment malfunctions and lives that are often at stake. In a contingency operation, contracting officers are like surgeons in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital unit. There is a lot of work to do and little time to get everything "perfect." "Sufficiency" is now a relative term, resources are limited to determine responsibility of the prospective contractor and every contractor wants advance payments or letters of credit. My supervisor says we work a 3-day workweek: they wanted it yesterday, you work on it today, it gets here tomorrow. The resources that we're used to in the United States simply don't exist here, so you rely on your experience and exercise sound judgment. There are no electronic fund transfers to pay contractors because no local banks are sophisticated enough to accommodate the system. So many times an armed finance officer and I pay contractors in cash. One of my interpreters is a business liaison between CPA and the local

marketplace making \$15 a day. "I am rich," he tells me. Others are more fortunate. I have a "buyer's agent" who makes purchases in the local marketplace and acts as liaison and interpreter making \$500 per month.



A mural defaced by Iraqi citizens.

The Iraqis I talk to are very bitter about Hussein and his regime. As Tahir, an interpreter, and I were walking past the palace one day, he explained how much things had changed since the war. "Before the war, if you look at the palace while walking, they stop and question you why you are looking." Another now-successful businessman told me he was imprisoned for 9 months for doing business outside of Iraq without Hussein's permission. No one knew where he had been or what happened to him during those 9 months.

Wahab is an interpreter and liaison working under contract for the CPA. As we sat together eating lunch in a cafeteria, I asked Wahab what the typical Iraqi citizen would say about the current conditions in Iraq.

"We have been taught to hate," he said. "Forty years of hate is not easy to erase. It is like walking in a long, dark tunnel. For what we have experienced in the past, we now have much to look forward to. But we are afraid you are here to suck the oil from us, and I tell them that America pays for oil the same price as everyone else.

"During the war, a woman was in much pain from burns all over her body. The American Marines were trying to help her. When she would yell in pain, they would raise their hands to stop hurting her. They could not find a vein in her arms because of the burns. They tried to help her for 45 minutes and finally found a vein in her neck to give the injection. I saw this and I believe they were sincere. We need to see these things."

After he finished speaking, I thought about the elaborate palace Saddam had built for himself in Baghdad. The walls and floors elaborately decorated with several types of highly polished granite and marble. A huge bust of Hussein himself is positioned at each corner of the rooftop outside the palace, his eyes under the helmet seemingly keeping stern watch over the countryside. On the highway about half a mile beyond the palace stand two walls joined together at a 90-degree angle. On each wall is a quartz mural of Hussein: one, the statesman — dressed in shirt and tie with a flower in his lapel; the other, a military commander wearing a helmet with his hand resting on the sword strapped to his side. Both murals are intact except for the head, now replaced with bullet holes.

I wonder how the change will come. Like Wahab's experience, change will come one person at a time. Even, perhaps, through the acts of one person. Like those Marines, it has to be sincere.

Working here is an extremely challenging experience where the achievements, or even the outcome, may not be fully comprehended except by the citizens being directly affected. I believe all of us are honored to be here and to be a part of this effort.

This article was written by Dennis P. Longo, Contracting Officer, Coalition Provisional Authority, Baghdad, Iraq.

Career Broadening Opportunities

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology is offering developmental assignments for all DA employees who are GS-12 and Level III certified in the Contracting and Acquisition Career Program (CP-14). Assignment durations are 6 months to 1 year. The formal developmental program is run through the Contracting Career Program Office, which funds travel and temporary duty costs.

For more information on CP-14 developmental assignments, go to <http://asc.army.mil/docs/programs/cp/FY04CPDAnnouncement.doc>. For Contracting Career Program Office information, contact Sally Garcia at (703) 704-0112.

Contracting Successes

AMCOM's Contracting Professionals of the Quarter. A U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command (AMCOM) Acquisition Center contracting team is recognized for its efforts in awarding a Program Executive Office Air and Missile Defense Common Hardware/Software-3 requirement. The 5-member team used various acquisition reform measures to successfully negotiate and award, in an unprecedented 45 days, a competitive best-value, indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity, time and materials contract with a potential value of \$2 billion over a 10-year period of performance. The AMCOM team placed special emphasis on encouraging and maximizing small-business participation. The winning proposal has a 29.1 percent goal established for small business and 24.6 percent goal for small disadvantaged businesses.



Pictured from left are AMCOM Commander MG Larry Dodgen, Dorphelia Wherry, Acquisition Center Executive Director Marlene Cruze, Rod Matthews, Ted Arterberry, Detra Battle-Blue, Milt Petersen and CSM Gregory Lunn.

Army Contracting Agency (ACA) Northern Region. COL Steven R. Boshears, Director, ACA Northern Region, recently announced that the Northern Region Contracting Center (NRCC) awarded master contracts for Security Guard Services for all Tier II installations in late September. Earlier this year, awards were made for all Tier I installations. Six contracts totaling \$126 million for the 20 high-priority installations have been awarded to four different contractors. Under the direction of NRCC Commander LTC Fred Roitz, contracting team members Barbara Blair, Abra Smith, Joe Farrell and Laurie Avery were recognized for their expeditious contract awards and expertise.

TACOM-Watervliet Socioeconomic Programs. Hats off to Melanie Keith of the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM)-Watervliet Arsenal Contracting Office. Melanie placed 100 percent (\$2.7 million) of the 8(a) awards, 99.9 percent (\$1.3 million) of the HUBZone awards and 83 percent (\$1.5 million) of the woman-owned awards for Watervliet Arsenal in FY03. Through the use of several Blanket Ordering Agreements for construction with 8(a) and 8(a) HUBZone woman-owned businesses, Melanie made it possible for Watervliet to achieve outstanding performance in these socioeconomic areas. This is no small feat for one contract specialist/contracting officer. Great effort!

Joint Munitions Command (JMC). JMC's Armament Retooling and Manufacturing Support (ARMS) Team is recognized for using acquisition reform to transform Army ammunition plants. In 2002, the ARMS program saved the Army \$48 million by using

incentives and innovative acquisition techniques to attract commercial tenants onto idle portions of Army installations. Revenues from these tenants reduce the Army's cost of ownership and overhead rates, thus lowering ammunition unit costs. The ARMS program has lowered the future disposal cost of facilities, increased the value of facilities, retained critical industrial skills, provided \$461 million in economic impact to local communities and sustained more than 3,400 jobs.

U.S. Army Medical Research Acquisition Activity (USAMRAA). USAMRAA is recognized for its excellent leadership and commitment to supporting the Industries for the Blind. USAMRAA personnel dedicated time and effort to establish the Base Supply E-commerce program within the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command. An intense marketing effort, classroom training and distribution of literature to establish the Industries for the Blind as an acquisition solution was initiated by USAMRAA. The Industries for the Blind provides all office supply needs (more than 37,000 items) in one simple desktop delivery system with next-day delivery. This successful program is embraced by the customers who now use its exceptional services.

SPS Army Users' Conference: Updates on Upgrades

On July 15-18, 2003, the U.S. Army Contracting Agency (ACA), the Army Business Center for Acquisition Systems (ABCAS), and the American Management Systems (AMS) Army Response Team hosted a Standard Procurement System (SPS) Army Users' Conference in Las Vegas, NV. More than 380 procurement professionals attended the event, which featured business system leaders from ACA, SPS and other DOD programs.

Stephanie Mullen, Deputy Director, Business Systems Management Directorate, ACA, welcomed participants to the conference. She stated that Adapter technology being inserted into the soon-to-be deployed versions of the Procurement Desktop Defense (PD2) software (which powers SPS), must be uploaded by Army procurement professionals themselves to their



Debbie Rice, Contract Specialist/Systems Administrator (SA), Florida National Guard U.S. Property and Fiscal Office; Bob Parillo, SPS User Satisfaction Manager; and MaryAnn Maynard, SA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, enjoyed this year's SPS Users' Conference.

desktops. Both of these topics formed the conference's theme, "Adapting to the Future."

SPS Background

In 1996, DOD took an important first step to streamline its contract-writing and acquisition processes when it purchased PD2, a commercial off-the-shelf solution based on proprietary software developed by AMS, based in Fairfax, VA. DOD enhanced readiness and support to warfighters through the standardization and optimization of procurement systems and activities using SPS.

Today, 23,000 DOD procurement professionals (nearly 8,000 of them Army) use SPS. It's the first — and still the only — electronic business system designated for department-wide deployment.

ACA Director Keynote Address

The conference's keynote speaker, Sandra Sieber, ACA Director spoke of ACA's transformation progress and its impact on Army business systems. ACA was initiated in January 2002 to support the Army's centralized installation management plan. Activated just 9 months later, ACA is a field operating agency under the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology. ACA is one of the three largest contracting organizations in the Army and has more than 2,300 employees worldwide.

During her address to Army SPS users, Sieber — ACA's first Director — said the organization's focus is on enterprise buying opportunities facilitated by Armywide business processes. In less than 1 year, ACA has made significant progress, including awarding a new master license agreement with Microsoft® and awarding a master blanket purchase agreement for cell phones and pagers.

Both achievements leveraged the buying power of Armywide purchases and contracting vehicles and resulted in substantial cost savings for the Army.

Sieber said ACA will continue to make progress and refine itself as it faces the challenges all new offices face, including merging cultures from several organizations. The most daunting challenge Sieber faces is coordinating the Army's automated business systems with other DOD automated systems. "The government needs to ensure adequate coordination with affected systems before implementing new systems," she continued.

To that end, ACA is working closely with SPS and Business Management Modernization Program (BMMP) leaders. "We've learned a lot from SPS from an IT [information technology] program management standpoint," Sieber continued. "Process changes need to be addressed before they can be automated. We're real good at automating old systems, but we're finding that paper works better if we don't change the processes behind the old systems," she added.

Responsibility for SPS Armywide falls under the purview of ACA. Sieber said ACA is working closely with SPS at several levels to ensure that Army users' needs are addressed in upcoming versions of SPS software and integration with existing Army systems is incorporated.

SPS Program Manager

SPS Program Manager COL Jake Haynes followed Sieber's address with an update on the program and thanked the Army for its continued — and growing — support of SPS. For example, Fort Lee, VA, volunteers ran the latest version of PD2 (v4.2 Increment 2)



COL Jake Haynes, SPS Program Manager, fields a question from Angelica Moshhammer, ACA Germany, during his presentation.

through its paces, performing actual contracting functions that SPS users experience every day.

"Thanks to Fort Lee, we got real-time feedback about v4.2.2," Haynes remarked. "We were able to make adjustments immediately. As a result, customer satisfaction is at an all-time high and our deployment schedule was cut in half."

Haynes also noted that the teamwork between the Army, other military services and agencies, the SPS Joint Program Management Office (JPMO) and DOD leaders, results in cost savings. These cost savings allowed a long list of requirements to be addressed in the developing version of PD2 (v4.2 Increment 3).

Addressing new requirements, many of which come from users themselves, is an involved process and one that must meet the needs of a growing number of stakeholders, Haynes explained. While Army users have specific requirements they want to see implemented right away, other users, including DOD, have requirements to be fulfilled as well.

The SPS Joint Requirements Board (JRB) weighs these competing requirements and prioritizes the list. JRB is comprised of representatives from the military services and other defense agencies. JRB stratifies requirements using the industry-accepted prioritization standard of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). The decision to use the IEEE was a significant change Haynes made when he came to the program 2 years ago to ensure processes addressed the needs of users and DOD leaders.

"The JRB members are your SPS congressmen," Haynes continued. "If you've got a change you'd like to see in the software, contact your JRB rep and get it on the table. That's the most effective way for users to change SPS."

Adapter: Coming Soon

Amy Taylor, Technical Division Chief, SPS JPMO, provided participants with an in-depth look at upcoming PD2 technology, focusing on the Adapter, which is part of a software solution that will provide a more "open" interface to simplify integration between PD2 and external systems.

JPMO will be working with the Army and other military services to replace the existing proprietary SPS-Integration interfaces with the more open Adapter

interfaces, which are based on Extensible Markup Language technology and commercial software products. Users are looking forward to the changes the Adapter will bring. "Let me tell you, the Adapter is good. You can really see what's going on in the system from end-to-end," said Dan Rolle, an Army contracting officer in Weisbaden, Germany, and a volunteer tester for v4.2.2.

Army Self-Upgrade

Users are excited about the Adapter and other expanded functionality in v4.2.2, but deployment methodology is going to be different than past deployments, warned SPS Desk Officer George M. Chavis Sr., whose briefing followed Taylor's. Chavis is the primary point of contact for Army users and is a direct liaison between the Army and the SPS JPMO.

"This upgrade [to v4.2.2] is going to be a self-upgrade, occurring on the database and application servers ... and will be performed by system administrators or [other] personnel. Client software will be upgraded at users' desktops by system administrators," said Chavis. The upgrade is scheduled to begin in mid-2004. Prior to the upgrade, Chavis will conduct regional pre-upgrade conferences to remind users of the information provided at the conference and to ensure individual sites are prepared for the upgrade.

Other Sessions

Other informative sessions included briefings by ACA Business Intelligence and BMMP officials.

SPS Positive Feedback

Users at the conference were positive and upbeat about SPS. Charlene Duncan, Procurement Analyst, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Walla Walla, WA, district, liked the ability to go totally paperless. "The end document is a better document, and you have a lot more 'flexibility' with SPS versus the old SAACONS [Standard Army Automated Contracting System]. But there's still room for improvement," Duncan said. She added that SPS was designed to be too restrictive for a contract specialist and that if contract specialists really know their job, they shouldn't have a tool tell them they can't do something."

Bob Parillo, SPS User Satisfaction Manager, addressed Duncan's comments. He said that SPS is a standardized system, and the goal is to standardize the procurement process across DOD. Parillo added that it can mean less

flexibility in some instances, but the payoff will be for DOD as a whole because procurement data will be accessible and transferable to a number of related business systems across DOD's acquisition and financial communities.

Shared Information

Users said they came to the conference to get information and share lessons learned with other users. Jim Capuzziello, Army Materiel Command, said that he's come to every conference since 1999. He added that the amount of information you get and the networking are what these conferences are all about.

Comments like Capuzziello's reflected the upbeat mood of users, who, through a conference communications survey, said they appreciated the Army hosting SPS conferences. The Las Vegas conference was the seventh Army SPS Conference since 1999.

For more information about the conference (including a copy of the presentations), go to <https://www.armysps.sdcl.lee.army.mil>.

Linda Polonsky-Hillmer is President, CorpComm Inc., and has worked with SPS since its inception.

Army Awards Aviation Simulation Services Contract

The Army Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation (PEO STRI) announced the award of a service contract to provide aviation simulation services to the U.S. Army Aviation Center at Fort Rucker, AL, to Computer Sciences Corp. (CSC) Federal Sector-Defense Group, Falls Church, VA. Flight School XXI Simulation Services will permit the U.S. Army Aviation Center to conduct individual and crew training in a computerized synthetic environment and collective, combined-arms training in a real-time, interactive computerized battlefield. CSC will provide a comprehensive suite of contractor-owned and operated helicopter simulators, enabling the Aviation Center to teach basic and advanced flight techniques to student pilots and rated aviators training on "go-to-war" aircraft.

The contract awarded to CSC is a fixed price contract with award-term provisions, with a potential value of

\$1.1 billion over performance period of 19 1/2 years. CSC will provide, manage, test, install, integrate, operate, maintain and upgrade simulators concurrent with the latest fielded aircraft at the home of Army aviation. CSC will also be responsible for future concurrency updates and total life-cycle support costs of the simulators throughout contract life.

PEO STRI is headquartered in Central Florida's Research Park in East Orlando, FL. In addition to research, development and program management, the PEO provides life-cycle support and operations for most of the Army's training systems around the world. PEO STRI is dedicated to putting the power of simulation into the hands of warfighters.

Secretary of the Army Awards Presented for Contracting Excellence

The annual Secretary of the Army Awards for Excellence in Contracting Ceremony was held Aug. 11, 2003, in conjunction with the Army Acquisition Senior Leaders' Conference in Seattle, WA. Army Acquisition Executive/Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology Claude M. Bolton Jr. and Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Policy and Procurement (DASA P&P) Tina E. Ballard presented the awards. MAJ Joy N. Kollhoff, Acquisition Support Center, Fort Belvoir, VA, was the master of ceremonies.

The Secretary of the Army Awards for Excellence in Contracting commend exemplary contracting organizations and individuals. This Armywide award honors excellence and leadership in a variety of contracting activities, and distinguishes contracting individuals and organizations that excel in customer satisfaction, productivity, process improvement and quality enhancement. Hard work and dedication have placed these winners in an elite class.

Nominating Process

This year, 61 nominations were received. A letter requesting nominations is issued at the end of the current fiscal year. Nominations are submitted online at <https://apps.rdaia.army.mil/saaec/awards.htm>. Each nomination is endorsed by the nominee's major command/major subordinate command (MACOM/MSO)

principal assistant responsible for contracting (PARC), the program executive officer or other appropriate official. There is no limit on the number of nominations that may be submitted. However, when more than one nomination is submitted by an organization, the endorsing official will rank order the nominations within specific categories before submitting them to the Department of the Army. An evaluation board consisting of senior-level contracting personnel, convenes, reviews and evaluates all selection packages and reconvenes for the final award determination.

This year's award recipients represented seven commands: the U.S. Army Pacific Command (USARPAC), the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command (SMDC), the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE), the U.S. Army Contracting Command Europe (USACCE), the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM), and the U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command (CECOM). A list of the FY02 award recipients follows:

Unit/Team Awards

- *Unit/Team Award for Installation-Level Contracting Center*
Recipient: Fort Hood Contracting Command, Fort Hood, TX (FORSCOM)
- *Unit/Team Award for Installation-Level Contracting Satellite*
Recipient: Directorate of Contracting, Fort Campbell, KY (FORSCOM)
- *Unit/Team Award for Systems Contracting*
Recipient: Brigade Combat Contracting Team, Warren, MI (TACOM)
- *Unit/Team Award for Specialized Contracting*
Recipient: Residential Contracting Initiatives Performance Delivery Task Force (RCI PDT), Washington, DC (USACE)

Outstanding Contracting Officers

- *Outstanding Contracting Officer at Installation-Level Center (Military)*
Recipient: MAJ Willard G. Zbaeren, (USARPAC), 9th Theatre Support Command, Okinawa, Japan (FORSCOM)
- *Outstanding Contracting Officer at Installation-Level Center (Civilian)*
Recipient: Yvonne S. Land, Anniston Army Depot, Anniston, AL (TACOM)

- *Outstanding Contracting Officer at Installation-Level Satellite (Military)*
Recipient: MAJ Scott F. Bruner, Directorate of Contracting, Fort Campbell, KY (FORSCOM)
- *Outstanding Contracting Officer at Installation-Level Satellite (Civilian)*
Recipient: Phyllis Y. Poyhonen, SMDC, Huntsville, AL
- *Outstanding Contracting Officer in Specialized Contracting (Civilian)*
Recipient: Dr. James J. Rich, USACE, Baltimore District, MD
- *Outstanding Contracting Officer in Systems Contracting (Civilian)*
Recipient: Lynn Selfridge, SMDC, Huntsville, AL
- *Outstanding Contracting Officer in Contingency Contracting (Military)*
Recipient: MAJ Stephen J. Conaway, FORSCOM, Fort Drum NY
- *Outstanding Contracting Officer in Contingency Contracting (Civilian)*
Recipient: Pamela Runyon, USACE, Europe, Grafenwoehr, Germany

Special Awards

- *Secretary of the Army Professionalism in Contracting (Military)*
Recipient: COL Charles J. Guta, FORSCOM, Fort McPherson, GA
- *Secretary of the Army Professionalism in Contracting (Civilian)*
Recipient: Kathleen T. Walk, CECOM, Fort Monmouth, NJ

Secretary of the Army Award for Exceptional Support of the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act Program

The JWOD Program is one of the most important programs that the Army uses to help blind and severely disabled people. This award recognizes commands, installations or activities that successfully initiate significant additions of products or services to the Procurement List of the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Handicapped.

Recipient: Barbara G. Maxwell, 63rd Regional Support Command, Directorate of Contracting Cell, Los Alamitos, CA (FORSCOM)

Bolton was delighted to recognize the performance of such outstanding contracting professionals and organizations and encourages all commands to continue to support this prestigious recognition of Army contracting personnel. Nominations for FY03 awards can be submitted from October through December 2003.

DTIC Annual Users Meeting

The Defense Technical Information Center's (DTIC's) 30th annual user's meeting will be held March 29 – April 1, 2004, at the Hilton Old Town, Alexandria, VA. DTIC's customers include scientists, engineers and professionals in the federal technology research, development, information science and acquisition communities. Conference participants represent DOD, other federal agencies, contractors and potential contractors. Government and commercial exhibitors will demonstrate their latest information technologies, and the conference agenda will address changing information sources and technologies in support of research, development, test and engineering programs. For more information, or to register for this year's conference, go to <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/annualconf/>.

Air Travelers Give up Seats for Soldiers

Nearly everyone has experienced an airport bogged down by bad weather, delayed and cancelled flights, and overtired travelers wanting nothing more than to get to their destinations.

That was exactly what Will Ross, an Administrative Judge for the Defense Department's Office of Hearings and Appeals in Los Angeles, encountered Oct. 27 at the Baltimore/Washington International Airport. But he said what he witnessed that day made him proud to be an American.

"(It) also told me why we will win this war (on terrorism)," Ross said. Like many of his fellow passengers, Ross had been forced to spend the night in Baltimore. The California wildfires had forced the Los Angeles International Airport to close, and the ripple effect drove domestic travel nationwide into a tailspin.

When Ross reported to the airline counter the following morning for the next scheduled flight to Los Angeles, bad weather and aircraft mechanical problems made the prospect of a timely trip even grimmer. In the terminal, Ross noticed many servicemembers in their desert camouflage uniforms, arriving from Southwest Asia and awaiting connecting flights. In the servicemembers' case, it was to begin two weeks of rest and recuperation leave.

By the afternoon, one particular flight to Denver had been delayed several hours. Airline agents kept asking for volunteers to give up their seats and take another flight, but with few takers, Ross said. Finally, Ross said an airline spokeswoman for the Denver flight got on the public address system and made a desperate plea. "Folks, as you can see, there are a lot of soldiers in the waiting area," the agent said. "They only have 14 days of leave and we're trying to get them where they need to go without spending any more time in an airport than they have to."

"We sold them all tickets knowing we would oversell the flight. If we can, we want to get them all on this flight. We want all the soldiers to know ... we respect what you're doing, we are here for you and we love you," the agent continued.

"The entire terminal of cranky, tired, travel-weary people — a cross-section of America — broke into sustained and heartfelt applause," Ross said. "We're talking about several hundred people applauding, a whole terminal. The soldiers looked surprised and very modest. Most of them just looked at their boots."

Many of the travelers in the terminal wiped away tears. "And, yes," Ross said, "30 to 40 people lined up to take the later flight and all the soldiers went to Denver on that flight. 'I think people realized that this fight is going to be long and drawn-out, and these kids are in the thick of it,' he said. "It was heartwarming to see their outpouring of support."

This article was written by Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service.